



Inside CFSA

For Our Child-Serving Community

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Clinical Practice Mobilizes Expert Help for Children

While all child welfare agencies use the services of health and mental health experts to help diagnose and treat abused and neglected children, most do not have these experts on staff. CFSA's in-house Clinical Practice function is a unique and valuable resource that helps social workers serve troubled families and children more effectively.

Clinical Practice has spearheaded a number of improvements in the way CFSA handles cases. Among these is holding disruption conferences that seek to resolve issues threatening a child's placement in foster care. The goal is to identify and mobilize services quickly and effectively, resulting in increased stability for children. Disruption conferences, which have been underway since the beginning of this year, expand and improve options for troubled children, as the following story shows.

Sadie has been in the child welfare system since 1991. Now age 17, she is a teen mom with a three-month-old daughter. Earlier this month, CFSA placed Sadie in a teen-mom program in a group home. She is having difficulties adjusting to this placement. In just the first few days in the group home, Sadie had confrontations with other residents, stayed out past curfew, kept her infant out late, and had late-night visits with the child's father.

Since stability is important to wellbeing, CFSA wants to reduce the number of times foster children move—or disrupt—in placement. In this case, after the group home reported Sadie's behavior, the social worker made every effort to prevent disruption. However, the group home felt Sadie's behavior was undermining their program. The social worker requested a disruption conference to attempt to salvage this placement for Sadie.

At the conference are: Sadie, her boyfriend, her guardian *ad litem* (GAL) from the court, her CFSA social worker, a CFSA supervisor, the assistant corporation counsel on the case, and a CFSA Clinical Practice specialist to serve as the moderator. The group of professionals hears Sadie's history before and during her time in care and reviews services she has received. Sadie is frustrated and defensive and denies that she broke the group-home rules. Although her boyfriend denies being a danger to anyone at the group home, all the residents lost visiting privileges because he allegedly threatened them with a gun. Sadie finally admits threatening her housemates.

Disruption conferences provide a decision-making forum where the child, family and/or other supportive people, and professionals involved in the case develop a plan to improve the child's stability. In this case, after evaluating Sadie's strengths and needs, the clinical specialist recommends

individual and group therapy and anger management and parenting skills training. She also suggests that the caseworker may be able to prevent immediate disruption for Sadie by having her sign an agreement to comply with the group-home rules for 30 days until another placement can be identified. The group home will not take Sadie back without this agreement. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for early April.

New Recruitment Approaches Aim to Attract More Social Workers

CFSA has approximately 270 licensed masters- and bachelors-level social workers. This represents a net increase of 30 social workers over the past year.

In FY 2003, CFSA's goal is to end the year with a total of 310 licensed social workers. In January, CFSA Human Resources launched several new approaches with the goal of attracting more qualified candidates to the agency.

Among key strategies are aggressive outreach to both local and selected distant colleges and universities with schools of social work, participation in major conferences in the social work field, increased advertising, and targeting bi-lingual candidates. So far in FY 2003, CFSA has hired 23 MSWs and 10 BSWs.

At the same time, CFSA's retention of social workers is relatively strong. Of licensed social workers hired during FY02, all but one remain on board. For all licensed social workers at CFSA, the turnover rate in FY02 was 17 percent—below the annual average of 20 percent for state child welfare agencies. CFSA continues to work to improve retention through strategies such as reducing caseloads, upgrading training, and providing more support for doing a tough job.

CFSA Budget Hearing in April

Mayor Anthony A. Williams announced his proposed fiscal year budget for 2004 on Mar. 17. Because of the national economy, he had to make difficult decisions regarding the District's budget. Olivia Golden reported that the Mayor is continuing to support CFSA's work. CFSA's budget hearing before the District Council is scheduled for Apr. 9 and will be held at Council Chamber, Room 500, 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004 from 10 AM - 2 PM. Interested parties planning to testify can contact Yolanda McPhail-Mckinley at (202) 442-6003. ■

CFSA Public Information faxes this newsletter monthly to providers and other partners. To provide comments or to update your fax number, call (202) 442-6015. Editor: Derek Stewart ■